RANI LAKSHMI BAI (1835 - 1858)



JHANSI KI RANI was the great heroine of the First War of Indian Freedom. She became a widow at the tender age of 18 and lived only till 22 yet she has inspired many and is still a living legend. She was the embodiment of patriotism, self-respect and heroism. Her life is a thrilling story of womanliness, courage, adventure, deathless patriotism and martyrdom. In her tender body there was a lions spirit.

At birth she was named Manu. The young Manu, unfortunately she lost her mother when she was only four. The entire duty of bringing up the daughter fell on her father. Along with formal education she acquired the skill in sword fighting, horse riding and shooting. Manu later became the wife of Gangadhar Rao, Maharaj of Jhansi, in 1842. From then on she was known as Maharani Laksmi Bai of Jhansi.

In 1851 Maharani Lakshmi Bai bore a son but her fate was cruel and she lost her child within three months. The Maharaja passed away on the 21st November 1853. Although prior to this the Maharaja and Maharani adopted a boy the British government claimed they did not recognise the right of the adopted boy. Thus they tried to buy off the Rani however she stated: "No, impossible! I shall not surrender my Jhansi!"It did not take her long to realise how difficult it was for the small state of Jhansi to oppose the British when even the Peshwas and Kings of Delhi had bowed down to the British Demands. The Rani’s battle now was against the British who had cunningly taken her kingdom from her.

After the British took over her government her daily routine changed. Every morning from 4am to 8am were set apart for bathing, worship, meditation and prayer. From 8am to 11am she would go out for a horse ride, practise shooting, and practise swordmanship and shooting with the reins held on her teeth. Thereafter she would bathe again, feed the hungry, give alms to the poor and then have food; then rested for a while. After that she would chant the Ramanyan. She would then exercise lightly in the evening. Later she would go through some religious books and hear religious sermons. Then she worshipped her chosen deity and had supper. All things were done methodically, according to her strict timetable. Such a dedicated and devoted women!

All these disciplined and training patterns came in use during the Indian Mutiny in 1857. Many lives were lost and innocence people killed. Although Bharat did not gain independence the Rani did win back Jhansi and created the state to its former glory having a full treasury and army of women matching the army of men. However Sir Hugh Rose attacked Jhansi on 17th March 1858. The next day’s battle was the Rani’s last. Her death was heroic, her army had declined as they were out numbered by the opposition. The British Army had encircled her and her men. There was no escape blood was flowing, darkness was approaching. The British army was pursuing her. After a great struggle the Rani died muttering quotes from the Bhagvad Gita.

When she went to War and took up arms she was the very embodiment of the War Goddess Kali. She was beautiful and frail. But her radiance made men diffident. She was young in years, but her decisions were mature. Such an confident and dominant women! A lesson is to be learnt for us all from her experiences! The words of the British General Sir Hugh Rose who fought against the Maharani several times and was defeated time and time again stated: "Of the mutineers the bravest and the greatest commander was the Rani".

Rani Chennamma of Keladi



Amongst the warriors of India’s medieval times and whom the Hindu civilisation is greatly indebted to is Rani Chennamma, who ruled the small kingdom of Keladi (which is in the present day Indian state of Karnataka) for 25 years from 1671-1696. She was very beautiful and hardly looks like a hardy warrior, but indeed she fought like an incarnation of Shakti, administered her kingdom well and took decisions that few others had the courage to take.

She was not from royal lineage, but the king of Keladi, Somashekhara Nayak met her and fell in love with her, hence she became queen. Queen Chennamma looked after the subjects of her kingdom and the servants of the palace with great love as if they were her children. She was not only a wife to Somashekhara Nayaka but also an adviser and trusted minister. If the government did any injustice, those who suffered, being afraid to go to the King, would make their appeals to the Queen. The Queen would speak to her husband and ensure justice. She was an inspiration to her husband to punish the wicked and protect the virtuous. The people of Keladi looked up to the Queen and were very devoted to her.

However this idyllic situation was not to last. Once, during the Dashera festival, the famed dancer Kalavathi of Jambukhandi gave a performance before the royal couple. This beautiful woman enchanted Somashekhara Nayaka. The King who was pleased with her excellence in dancing, gave her much wealth. Kalavathi became the dancer of the royal court. Her mother and her foster-father, Bharame Mavuta, lived with her. It is believed that Bharame Mavuta was a master of lower mysticism (black magic), secret medicines and intrigue. Bharame Mavuta developed an intimate friendship with Somashekhara Nayaka. Gradually the king began to live with Kalavathi herself. He became a puppet in the hands of Bharame Mavuta. He forgot his beloved Chennamma and stayed away from the palace. He used to take all sorts of potions and drinks that Bharame Mavuta gave him and as a result became half-mad with intoxication. Various diseases began to eat him up. Even the ministers and respected officers had to go to the dancer's house to discuss matters of the State.

Chennamma felt very sad that the husband who once loved her so deeply never came to the palace now. She was always in tears. Once all the subjects felt happy that it was their good fortune they had such an ideal King. But now he had no thought for the kingdom.

Because of the King's indifference there was chaos in the kingdom. The news of his ill-health spread all over the kingdom. The King had no children. What if he died suddenly? In such a pass, naturally, many persons began to hatch conspiracies to usurp the throne. The Sultan of Bijapur (a Muslim kingdom) who had often been defeated by the kings of Keladi when they had tried to cause trouble, now attacked the kingdom.

There was only one way, thought Chennamma, for the kindgom to continue and the dynasty to survive; she herself should rule the land and also hold the sword. Trusting God, the young Queen took this crushing burden on her tender shoulders. The clever and heroic Queen also took the counsel of her father Siddappa Shetty. She enlisted the help of trustworthy commanders. Delicate hands adorned with bangles now brandished the sword, and succesfully repulsed the enemy.

Soon enemies within the kingdom began to appear. Opportunists believed that she could be intimidated and manipulated for their profit. One day the Chief Minister, Thimmanna Nayaka of Kasaragod, went to her with Subnis Krishnappa and said to her, "You must adopt as son Veerabhadra Nayaka, the son of the Commander-in Chief, Bhadrappa Nayaka. It is only then that we shall support you. Or else, we will unite the people against you and crown him." The same threat was held out by another minister, Narasappayya and a senior officer, Lakshmayya. Queen Chennamma heard them all patiently. On one side, Bharame Mavuta had the King under his thumb and was eager to take over the kingdom. On another side, all the ministers and other important men were ready to bring some one whom they liked to the throne and perpetuate their own positions. The Queen could not approve of either of these options. She had no child; so she decided that she should adopt a boy who was virtuous and would herald the welfare of the State. She chose a boy by name Basappa Nayaka. She decided to give him the proper type of training so that the kingdom survived and the people were made happy.

Keeping an eye on the developments in Keladi, the Sultan of Bijapur thought that with a well planned strike he could swallow up the kingdom. He sent a representative by name Jannopant to the Queen for negotiations. Close on the heels of Jannopant the Sultan also sent a big army under the command of Muzaffar Khan. Rani Chennamma saw through the trick and raised an army of the common people, invoking the glory of their ancestors. The army repulsed Bijapur’s forces.

In peace time too the Rani ruled very well, and patronised arts and learning. She had an 'Agrahara' - an entire street with houses on either side - formed, and invited scholars to settle down there. It was named 'Somashekharapura'. Day and night Chennamma toiled for the welfare of the state. She expanded the army and strengthened security at the borders. After her work for the kingdom, Chennamma spent whatever leisure she had, in meditation and in acts of charity and kindness. She gave gifts of lands to rishis and religious institutions.

Perhaps the most famous aact of Rani Chennamma is her unparalleled bravery in giving refuge to Rajaram, the 2nd son of the great Shivaji, when he was on the run from Moghul forces who were trying to crush the fledgling Hindu kingdom after the death of Shivaji. Fearing the wrath of the Moghuls, who were at that time the greatest force in India, not many kingdoms were willing to give refuge to Rajaram. One day Rajaram turned up at Keladi and explained his requirement for refuge. Rani Chennamma agreed to house him, with the rationale that Shivaji had greatly turned the tables for Hindus in India, and that to house Shivaji’s son was duty for a Hindu. Yet several ministers and leaders of Keladi such as Commander Bhadrappa and Minister Narasappayya amongst others were of the opinion that it was not worth the risk, because the Maratha kingdom that Shivaji has set up was doomed and it was not worth getting in trouble over a doomed dynasty. Rani Chennamma was adamant.

Aurungzeb did learn that Rajaram had taken shelter in Keladi and he dispatched an army to punish them. Under Rani Chennamma’s leadership the attacks were successfully repulsed – a great achievement at a time when the Moghuls were very powerful. The treaty that followed caused Aurungzeb to be forced to recognise Keladi as a separate kingdom.

It cannot be emphasised how much the Hindu nation are indebted to Rani Chennamma for her defence of the Marathas. The Maratha kingdom later went on to reduce the Moghuls to a virtual non-entity within a few decades after this. If Rani Chennamma had not taken the timely decision of giving her protection, at her own risk, who knows where we would be now?

Rani Padmini



In the 12th and 13th centuries, the Sultanate of Delhi - the kingdom set up by the invaders was nevertheless growing in power. The Sultans made repeated attack on Mewad on one pretext or the other. Here we may recollect the story of Rani Padmani who was the pretext for Allah-ud-din Khilji's attack on Chittod. In those days Chittod was under the Rule of King Ratansen, a brave and noble warrior-king. Apart, from being a loving husband and a just ruler, Ratansen was also a patron of the arts. In his court were many talented People one of whom was a musician named Raghav Chetan. But unknown to anybody, Raghav Chetan was also a sorcerer. He used his evil talents to run down his rivals and unfortunately for him was caught red-handed in his dirty act of arousing evil spirits.

On hearing this King Ratansen was furious and he banished Raghav Chetan from his kingdom after blackening his face with face and making him ride a donkey. This harsh Punishment earned king Ratansen an uncompromising enemy. Sulking after his humiliation, Raghav Chetan made his way towards Delhi with -the aim of trying to incite the Sultan of Delhi Ala-ud-din Khilji to attack Chittor.

On approaching Delhi, Raghav Chetan settled down in one of the forests nearby Delhi which the Sultan used to frequent for hunting deer. One day on hearing the Sultan's hunt party entering the forest, Raghav-Chetan started playing a melodious tone on his flute. When the alluring notes of Raghav-Chetan flute reached the Sultan's party they were surprised as to who could be playing a flute in such a masterly way in a forest.

The Sultan despatched his soldiers to fetch the person and when Raghav-Chetan was brought before him, the Sultan Ala-ud-din Khilji asked him to come to his court at Delhi. The cunning Raghav-Chetan asked the king as to why he wants to have a ordinary musician like himself when there were many other beautiful objects to be had. Wondering what Raghav-Chetan meant, Ala-ud-din asked him to clarify. Upon being told of Rani Padmini's beauty, Ala-ud-din's lust was aroused and immediately on returning to his capital he gave orders to his army to march on Chittor

But to his dismay, on reaching Chittor, Allah-ud-din found the fort to be heavily defended. Desperate to have a look at the legendary beauty of Padmini, he sent word to King Ratansen that he looked upon Padmini as his sister and wanted to meet her. On hearing this, the unsuspecting Ratansen asked Padmini to see the 'brother'. But Padmini was more wordly-wise and she refused to meet the lustful Sultan personally.

On being persuaded by her husband Rana Ratansen, Rani Padmini consented to allow Ala-ud-din to see her only in a mirror. On the word being sent to Ala-ud-din that Padmini would see him he came to the fort with his selected his best warriors who secretly made a careful examination of the fort's defences on their way to the Palace.

On seeing Padmini, in the mirror, the lustful 'brother', Allah-ud-din Khilji decided that he should secure Padmini for himself. While returning to his camp, Allah-ud-din was accompanied for some way by King Ratansen. Taking this opportunity, the wily Sultan deceitfully kidnapped Ratansen and took him as a prisoner into his camp and demanded that Padmini come and surrender herself before Allah-ud-din Khilji, if she wanted her husband King Ratansen alive again.

The Rajput generals decided to beast the Sultan at his own game and sent back a word that Padmini would be given to Ala-ud-din the next morning. On the following day at the crack of dawn, one hundred and fifity palaquins (covered cases in which royal ladies were carried in medieveal times) left the fort and made their way towards Ala-ud-din's camps The palanquins stopped before the tent where king Ratansen was being held prisoner. . Seeing that the palanquins had come from Chittor; and thinking that they had brought along with them his queen, king Ratansen was mortified. But to his surprise from the palanquins came out, not his queen and her women servants but fully armed soldiers, who quickly freed ; Ratansen and galloped away towards Chittor on horses grabbed from Ala-ud-din's stables.

On hearing that his designs had been frustrated, the lustful Sultan was furious and ordered his army to storm Chittor. But hard as they tried the Sultans army could not break into the fort. Then Ala-ud-din decided to lay seige to the fort. The seige was a long drawn one and gradually supplied within the fort were depleted. Finally King Ratnasen gave orders that the Rajputs would open the gates and fight to finish with the besieging troops. On hearing of this decision, Padmini decided that with their men-folk going into the unequal struggle with the Sultan's army in which they were sure to perish, the women of Chittor had either to commit suicides or face dishonour at the hands of the victorious enemy.

**Jauhar**

The choice was in favour of suicide through Jauhar. A huge pyre was lit and followed by their queen, all the women of Chittor jumped into the flames and deceived the lustful enemy waiting outside. With their womenfolk dead, the men of Chittor had nothing to live for. Their charged out of the fort and fought on furiously with the vastly Powerful array of the Sultan, till all of them perished. After this phyrrhic victory the Sultan's troops entered the fort only to be confronted with ashes and burnt bones of the women whose honour they were going to violate to satisfy their lust.

These women who committed Jawhar had to perish but theirmemory has been kept alive till today by bards and songs which glorify their act which was right in those days and circumstances. Thus a halo of honour is given to their supreme sacrifice.

Jijabai, Mother of Shivaji



Jijabai was the mother of Shivaji perhaps the most famous and succesful Hindu warriors of the medieval age. The life of his mother, Jijabai, is no less inspiring or sacred, and takes a proud place in our history.

Her father, Lakhuji Jadhav Rao, was an important leader serving under the Muslim Nizamshahi administration. During those days, many Hindu leaders of that region were serving under the Nizam. They had small armies of their own and had obtained lands, high position and ranks under the Nizam. But they hated one another and were always trying to increase their power and prestige at the expense of one another.

It was Holi, and Jijabai's father was holding a celebration at his hall, where many were assembled. Shahji, son of Maloji (who was serving under Jadhav Rao) the future husband of Jijabai was present. Shahji and Jijabai were still small kids. Jijabai poured coloured water over Shahji and Shahji did likewise. Jadhav Rao liked the boy, and drew him and his daughter to his side, and jokingly said "don’t you think these 2 make a great couple?" Everybody agreed. Maloji, who was watching, got up and said "Noble men, did you hear what our Jadhav Rao has said? Henceforth we are related to each other as parents of the bride and bridegroom!" But this was not what Jadhav Rao had in mind. He was in too high a rank compared with Maloji. He harshly rebuked Maloji, who was gravely insulted. Maloji left the hall, feeling embarrassed at the public spectacle.

In the following months, Maloji was deeply troubled. He was unsure of what next step to take in life. For a while he went back to tilling the fields, but he was sorrowed. One night, it is said that Maloji had a strange dream. The Goddess Bhavani appeared before him in dazzling splendour and advised him not to sulk, but strive hard in life, as a hero and bringer of a new era was soon to be born in his family. The next day in the field, late at night, he once again felt the presence of Bhavani, who advised him to dig at a certain spot. He did so, and unearthed 7 pots of treasure. However he was actually led to the treasure, its acquisition was to have an important bearing on India’s future. Maloji brought a unit of 1000 cavalry, and infantry. He provided security to the people, and to traders, and in doing so grew increasingly wealthy.

With his money, he dug wells, built lodges for travellers, fed the needy and renovated temples. His power and prestige grew, and more men began to serve under him. Maloji had not forgotten Jadhav Rao’s words. He was still insulted, and began to press him to allow Jijabai and Shahji to marry. Jadhav Rao refused, but Maloji resorted to intense pressure, and invoked the Nizam’s mediation, forcing Jadhav Rao to comply. Jijabai and Shahji were married. But Jadhav Rao developed a hatred for Maloji’s family, the Bhonsles. Shahji grew up as a renowned general and served the Nizam. Jadhav Rao joined the Moghuls (who were opposed to the Nizam) in order to harass Shahji, which he spent his life trying to do. This deeply troubled Jijabai. She was also unhappy that both her father and her husband were serving under Muslim sultans, who she saw as marauders. She cared not for the riches that this service could bring. It was liberty she loved.

In the meantime, the Moghuls invaded the Nizam’s dominions. Shahji was entrusted to look after the fort of Mahuli and Jadhav Rao joined in the attack. After 6 months resistance, Shahji had to evacuate the fort, with Jijabai, who was then 4 months pregnant. Jijabai got to Shivaneri, where she gave birth to Shivaji.

She used to pray, while pregnant in the temple of Jagadamba: **"O Mother of the Universe, give me some of your strength. Put an end to the pride of the Marathas in the shameful service to the Muslims. Grant our lands independence. Grant that my wish be fulfilled, O Mother."** She was angered at being around men whom could not protect their women, children, country and religion. She longed that her son may be part of a generation who could do this. She studied the intricate political problems of the country, in the company of experienced politicians and diplomats. She could see people falling into poverty in the once rich land and could see the culture which she loved so much being disintegrated. If only a leader could be born who could unite the scattered Hindus. It was ordered that while she was pregnant, every comfort be conferred upon her. But she wished for none of it. Rather, she wanted to climb to the tops of forts on hills, to wield swords, to discuss political questions, to put on armour and ride on horse back.

It has been said in ancient Hindu culture and is a proven fact today, that the pregnant mother, by the environment she provides, by the thoughts she thinks, and by what she wishes for her unborn child, does a tremendous amount to shape the childs life for good or bad. In Vedic traditions, there are a series of sacraments and chants to be carried out as to optimise the child’s potentials. Jijabai infused in Shivaji such a spirit, that was to emerge with great force throughout his life.

Then, the most crushing news struck Jijabai like lightening. Jadhav Rao, her father, who had recently been readmitted to the service of the Nizam, had been beheaded, together with her entire family. It is probable that the Nizam thought the Marathas were getting influential. Her husband too was in danger of meeting a similar fate, but he was shrewd and joined the Moghuls. Jijabai’s fiery spirit was set ablaze by the slaughter of her family. In the time that followed, whole villages of Marathas were wiped out. A Maratha princess was carried away while bathing. At one time Jijabai herself was kidnapped, as a bargaining chip. Such were the times in which she lived. But instead of frightening her, it just strengthened her resolve that an independent protector of the Hindus was an urgency. She brought up her son with a love of liberty infused in him. They lived at Pune, under the protection of Dadaji Kondev. Jijabai was one of the main administrators at Pune. She was educated, able and wielded great authority (not adhering to the myth of the "oppressed Hindu woman of medieval India"). When they arrived, Pune was a small village that had been consecutively ransacked by the Nizam, Adil Shah, and the Moghuls. Each and every Hindu shrine had been smashed. But soon Pune flourished, with the help of Jijabai. Jaijabai restored the shrines, and on many occasions settled disputes and metted out justice. She was responsible for most of Shivaji’s education. She had him learn in detail the lessons from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. He learnt about the holy scriptures and arts of administration and weaponry, and the political situations in the land.

Shahji married a second wife, Tukabai, and spent most of his time with her and her son. The effect this had on Jijabai, nobody can tell. Jijabai did not lose heart, and concerned herself as before, with admistration, bringing up Shivaji and in long periods of prayer and meditation. Jijabai even set the scenes for social reforms in Hindu society. To quote an example, on her advice, the brahmins allowed a soldier named Balaji Nimbalkar to re-embrace Hinduism after converting to Islam. In those days, many people were opposed to such a move, an attitude which to some extent persists today. But Jijabai could see that because Hindus created a system whereby people could leave the Hindu fold, but not enter it (which had no basis in the scriptures), Hindu society had been weakened. Jijabai impressed upon everybody the logic of this position. Further more, showing that she was genuine in her view, she gave Shivaji’s daughter Sakhubai in marriage to Balaji’s son.

While Shahji and Dadaji were worried when Shivaji, at the age of 16 first captured a major fort, Jijabai was overjoyed. When Afzal Khan, the renowned general of Bijapur came with a large army to crush Shivaji early in his career, Shivaji turned to his mother, who unlike others told him to face the danger resolutely. Shivaji’s army was tiny by comparison, but by biding his time and using lightening guerilla techniques, he worsted Afzal Khan’s army. When at a private meeting, Afzal Khan tried to kill Shivaji, Afzal Khan ended up dead. This episode greatly increased Shivaji’s prestige.

Jijabai treated Shivaji’s companions as her own sons, and was a source of courage and inspiration to them. Tanaji Malasure is one such renowned example. He lost the fort of Simhagadh to an intense Moghul attack. She famously told him "if you free Simhagad from the enemies you will be like Shivaji’s younger brother to me." Tanaji went forth, for what others advised to be mission impossible, and succeeded, but was martyred in the process. Jijabai was watching from her fort all night. When she saw the saffron flag of the Marathas ascend on the fort, she cried with joy. But shortly after she received the news of Tanaji’s death, she began to cry with pain and could not be consoled. Another hero, Baji Prabhu, a childhood friend of Shivaji, fought with great valour to save Shivaji’s life, and in doing so died. On hearing the news, Jijabai rather than being comforted that her son was safe wept as if she had lost her own son.

In her life Jijabai had to bare sorrow after sorrow, and did it bravely for her country and religion. She reflected the glory and strength of Mother Durga. We hope her life will always be remembered with reverance. In 1674, Shivaji held a vast ceremony, declaring himself an independent ruler. Jijabai was present at the ceremony. What joy she must have felt attending the ceremony - everything she had lived for had finally bore fruit. 12 days later, Jijabai died.

Rani Durgavati



Rani Durgavati was born on 5th October 1524 A.D. in the family of famous Chandel emperor Keerat Rai. She was born at the fort of Kalanjar(Banda, U.P.). Chandel Dynasty is famous in the Indian History for the valiant king Vidyadhar who repulsed the attacks of Mehmood Gaznavi. His love for sculptures is shown in the world famed temples of Khajuraho and Kalanjar fort. Rani Durgavati's achievements further enhanced the glory of her ancestral tradition of courage and patronage of arts.

In 1542, she was married to Dalpatshah, the eldest son of king Sangramshah of Gond Dynasty. Chandel and Gond dynasties got closer as a consequence of this marriage and that was the reason Keerat Rai got the help of Gonds and his son-in-law Dalpatshah at the time of invasion of Shershah Suri in which Shershah Suri died.

She gave birth to a son in 1545 A.D. who was named Vir Narayan. Dalpatshah died in about 1550 A.D. As Vir Narayan was too young at that time, Durgavati took the reins of the Gond kingdom in her hands. Two ministers Adhar Kayastha and Man Thakur helped the Rani in looking after the administration successfully and effectively. Rani moved her capital to Chauragarh in place of Singaurgarh. It was a fort of strategic importance situated on the Satpura hill range.

After the death of Shershah, Sujat Khan captured the Malwa zone and was succeeded by his son Bajbahadur in 1556 A.D. (Bajbahadur is famous in history for his tumultus love affair with Rani Roopmati). After ascending to the throne, he attacked Rani Durgavati but the attack was repulsed with heavy losses to his army. This defeat effectively silenced Bajbahadur and the victory brought name and fame for Rani Durgavati.

In the year 1562 Akbar vanquished the Malwa ruler Baj Bahadur and annexed the Malwa with Mughul dominion. Consequently, the state boundary of Rani touched the Mughal kingdom.

Rani's contemporary Mughul Subedar was Abdul Mazid Khan, an ambitious man who vanquished Ramchandra, the ruler of Rewa. Prosperity of Rani Durgavati's state lured him and he invaded Rani's state after taking permission from Mughul emperor. This plan of Mughul invasion was the result of expansionism and imperialism of Akbar.

When Rani heard about the attack by Asaf Khan she decide to defend her kingdom with all her might although her minister Adhar pointed out the strength of Mughal forces. Rani maintained that it was better to die respectfully than to live a disgraceful life.

To fight a defensive battle, she went to Narrai situated between a hilly range on one side and two rivers Gaur and Narmada on the other side. It was an unequal battle with trained soldiers and modern weapons in multitude on one side and a few untrained soldiers with old weapons on the other side. Her Faujdar Arjun Daswas killed in the battle and Rani decided to lead the defence herself. As the enemy entered the valley, soldiers of Rani attacked them. Both sides lost some men but Rani was victorious in this battle. She chased the Mughul army and came out of the valley.

At this stage Rani reviewed her strategy with her counsellors. She wanted to attack the enemy in the night to enfeeble them but her lieutenants did not accept her suggestion. By next morning Asaf khan had summoned big guns. Rani rode on her elephant Sarman and came for the battle. Her son Vir Narayan also took part in this battle. He forced Mughul army to move back three times but at last he got wounded and had to retire to a safe place. In the course of battle Rani also got injured near her ear with an arrow. Another arrow pierced her neck and she lost her consciousness. On regaining consciousness she perceived that defeat was imminent. Her Mahout advised her to leave the battlefield but she refused and took out her dagger and killed herself. Her martyrdom day(24th June 1564) is even today commomorated as "Balidan Diwas".

**Rani Durgavati's was a personality with varied facets. She was valiant, beautiful and brave and also a great leader with administrative skills. Her self-respect forced her to fight till death rather than surrender herself to her enemy.**

She, like her ancestral dynasty, built so many lakes in her state and did a lot for the welfare of her people. She respected the scholars and extended her patronage to them. She welcomed the Vitthalnath of Vallabh community and took Diksha from him. She was secular and appointed many eminent Muslims on important posts.

The place where she sacrificed herself has always been a source of inspiration for freedom fighters.

In the year 1983, the Government of Madhya Pradesh renamed the University of Jabalpur as Rani Durgavati Vishwavidyalaya in her memory.

Government of India paid its tribute to the valiant Rani by issuing a postal-stamp commemorating her martyrdom, on 24th June 1988

Mira Bai (c.1498-1546)



There are few Hindus who will not have heard of Mira bai, the Rajput princess whose devotional compositions have provided a voice to the spiritual yearning of millions, and have a distinct, even a feminist, emphasis to them. Many stories exist about Mira, and it is difficult to produce a factual account of her life, although she lives perpetually through her songs, famous throughout India/ The following is a shortened account about popular folk-lore about Mirabai:

Born in Rajisthan a land of warriors and sages, sadhus and kings, but also instability and sorrow, Mirabai showed great devotion for Lord Krishna in her childhood years. One day, a holy man came to her family’s palace and was carrying a small image of Krishna. Knowing that Mirabai would appreciate it, her mother brings her the little statue of Krishna. As the wandering sage left the palace he took his image of Krishna with him. Mira bai was very upset – in fact for days she lost her appetite and was very sad. But after a few days the sadhu returned. The night before, he explained, Krishna had appeared to him in a dream, telling him to return the image to Mira!

Mira grew up to be a beautiful young lady, and was duly married to the warrior Prince Bhoj, and went to live at his palace. However, despite being a devoted and dutiful wife, devotion to Lord Krishna was always foremost on her mind, which annoyed the family of her husband. Uda, her sister in law was most annoyed at Mira’s ways. They tried to stop her from visiting the temple. Prince Bhoj came to accept his wife’s nature, and thought of her as a great devotee of the Lord. He built her a small Krishna temple within the palace. However, for company with other devotees, Mira still sought to go to the village temple. She became acquainted with the great saint Ravidas, who was a humble shoemaker by profession, and learnt much about aspects of religion that she did not know about through him. She considered Ravidas her spiritual preceptor (Guru).

Although her in-laws were becoming enraged with her behaviour, several of them could see their was something very special about her. Ravidas is turn was very impressed and moved by the intensity of her devotion to Krishna. He brought her a sitar with his own meager resources, which she used to compose and play soul stirring devotional songs to all who would listen. Through her songs Mirabai’s fame grew exceedingly, spreading far and wide throughout India. Even the Moghul Emporer Akbar came to visit her, and was so moved by her songs that he gave her a precious necklace.

Meanwhile, Prince Bhoj, Mirabai’s husband was killed in battle, against the predatory Moghuls. Bhoj’s cousin seizes the throne, who was one member of the family who had harboured dislike for Mirabai. Finding Akbar’s necklace, he accused Mirabai of being a traitor. He confined her to her room, and ordered her precious image of Krishna to be thrown into the river. She still had her devotion to Krishna, but was distraught at not being able to be amongst her fellow devotees and resented being locked in a confined space. She is believed to have write to Tulsidas, who advised her to attempt to leave, which Mira bai did so. Mira’s sister-in-law, Uda had grown fond of Mira over time and was very saddened by Mira’s departure.

Mira roamed India in devotion to her beloved Lord Krishna. She could see Krishna everywhere and in everything, and her songs describe her rapture in this vision. She grew very famous and loved. This enraged the king, the cousin of Mira’s husband Bhoj’s. He was determined now that Mira should die. Many attempts were subsequently made on Mira’s life, none of which bore fruit, due to her unfathomable love and trust in Krishna.

Sister Nivedita - (1867-1911)

Sister Nivedita, alias Margaret Elizabeth Noble, was born at Dunganon, County Tyrone, Ireland, on 28 October 1867. She was the eldest daughter of Samuel Richmond and Mary Isabel. The Nobles were of Scottish descent and had been settled in Ireland for about five centuries.

Margaret was educated at the Halifax College run by the Chapter of the Congregationalist Church. She took up teaching work in 1884 at Keswick, in 1886 at Wrexham and in 1889 at Chester. Greatly influenced by the `New Education' method of Pestalozzi and Froebel, she started in 1892 a school of her own called `Ruskin School' in Wunbkedib. Her remarkable intellectual gifts made her well-known in the high society of London. Since childhood Christian religious doctrines were instilled into her. But search for truth led her in 1895-96 to Swami Vivekananda's teachings of the Vedanta (`Complete Works of Sister Nivedita', II 471). Later in India she followed the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, and was particularly devoted to Kali and Shiva of the Hindu deities.

She came to Calcutta on 28 January 1898, was initiated into Brahmacharya (a celibate yogic order) and was given the name `Nivedita' by Vivekananda on 25 March. SHe immediately became intensely active in her work of uplifting India. She opened a kindergarten school for Hindu girls in November 1989, joined plague relief works of the Ramakrishna Mission from March 1899, left for the West in July to collect funds for her school, formed "The Ramakrishna Guild of Help' in America, went to Paris in July 1900 (where Vivekananda attended the Congress of the History of Religions), left for England alone in September 1900, and returned to India in February 1902.

Nivedita's interest in the Indian political struggle for Independence led her to be disowned from the purely spiritual Ramakrishna Order after Vivekananda's death in July 1902, though in truth she maintained close relations with the Order and Sri Sarada Devi (the wife of Ramakrishna, the great yogi who the mission is named after). The Ramakrishna Mission's decision to publically disown themselves from Nivedita was the first in a long line of compromise with the principles which they had been set up for.

Nivedita's work, however, continued. She went on lecture tours throughout India from September 1902 to 1904 to rouse the national consciousness of the people. In 1905-06 she was actively associated with all public affairs in Bengal. The strain of relief work in the flood and famine-stricken areas of East Bengal in 1906 broke her health. In August 1907 she left for Europe and America, and returned to India in July 1909. She went to America again in October 1910, and returned in April 1911. In October 1911 she went to Darjeeling for a change. There she resided for a while, but her health failed under her intense work load, and she died on 13 October 1913.

Nivedita wrote extensively and has left behind a legacy of works which are worthy of study today. Her innumerable articles were published in journals like the Review of Reviews, the Prabuddha Bharata, the Modern Review, etc. Her first book was `Kali the Mother' (1900). Of her principal works the `Web of Indian Life' (1904) gives a more positive picture of India to the blindly critical West, and the `Master As I Saw Him' (1910) is an interpretation of Vivekananda's life and teachings.

The supreme goal towards which Nivedita worked was to see India emerge as a strong and powerful nation. Initially Nivedita stated that she desired to see England and India love each other (`Sister Nivedita' by Atmaprana, 1967, p. 59). But later she was embittered and disillusioned. From 1902 onwards she spoke and wrote against the British policy in India, and actively rallied revolutionary forces to fight the British with arms.

She attacked British polititians such as Lord Curzon for the Universities Act of 1904, for his insulting their shameless insults hurled at Indian culture and people, and for the clear attempts to encite Muslims in order to retard the Indian freedom movement. She was distressed by the disastrous condition of Indian economy and held British Imperialism responsible for it. Her politics became active and aggressive and she lost patience with moderate politics of the petitioner. Yet she was friendly with leaders of all schools of political thought like G. K. Gokhale and Bepin Chandra Pal, and young revolutionaries like Taraknath Das.

She encouarged and whole-heartedly supported the Swadeshi (self-reliance) Movement both in principle and in practice. She helped nationalist groups like the `Dawn Society' and the `Anusilan Samity'; was a member of the Central Council of Action formed by Sri Aurobindo Ghose and took up the editorship of the Karmayogin publication when he left British India. She wanted the whole nation to be educated on national lines (`Complete Works of Sister Navidita', IV, pp. 329-53). She encouraged the study of science, and helped Jagdish Chandra Bose in bringing to light his theories and discoveries. She believed that a rebirth of Indian Art was essential for the regeneration of India. She disproved the fiction of the Hellenic influence in Indian Art, inspired Rabindranath Tagore, who later won a Nobel Prize for his tremendous literature, as well as others to revive its glorious tradition.

Nivedita was one of the foremost in the galaxy of the twentieth century Hindu revivalists and her memory should be enshrined in the hearts of Hindus. Tall and fair, with deep blue eyes and brown hair, Nivedita was an image of purity and austerity in her simple white gown and with a rosary of rudraksha round her neck. A person of intense spirituality, force of character, strength of mind, intellectual power and wide range of studies, she could have achieved distinction in any sphere of life. Yet with unique self-effacement she lived a simple and austere life dedicated to the cause of India and Hinduism, on which the western world had systematically poured contempt.

She was described as `a real lioness' by Vivekananda, `Lokmata'(the mother of the people) by Rabindranath Tagore, and `Agnisikha' (the flame of fire) by Aurobindo Ghose. In England she was known as `The Champion for India', but who above all was a 'Sister' to the Indian people whom she loved. Her contribution to the promotion of national consciousness is immeasurable. "My task is to awaken the nation," she said once. Even today her book ‘Cradle Tales of Hinduism’ is read to children world wide, infusing them with the essence of Hindu consciousness. It was her dream to see in India the great re-establishment of Dharma, that is, national righteousness. The Indian people have immortalised her memory by creating a grand stone dedicated to her, in Calcutta.